

Quality Review Report 2011-2012

Luis Llorens Torres Children's Academy

**Elementary School 114
1155 Cromwell Avenue
Bronx**

Principal: Olivia Francis-Webber

Dates of review: May 30 – 31, 2012

Lead Reviewer: Anne Laitres

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Luis Llorens Torres Schools is an elementary school with 867 students from kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 18% Black, 77% Hispanic, 1% White, 3% Asian students, and 1% other students. The student body includes 32% English language learners and 16% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 91.9%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The administration thoughtfully structures schedules and assignments to support instructional goals. (1.3)
 - In order to reverse the downward trend in performance levels on the State tests in math and English language arts, administration targeted students performing in the lowest third for intense intervention. Key students were identified based on data from ARIS and Acuity. The school hired additional staff who along with additional part time teachers work directly with the students during the school day with the special focus on reading informational texts. Students have access to a Saturday academy, an English language learner's academy, and a holiday academy along with an after school program for test preparation. Technology provides an additional tool for working with the lowest third particularly in the area of math, so students can self-pace to complete math tasks. All grade level teachers have a daily common preparation period, and there are vertical planning opportunities after school once a month. As a result, teaching strategies have been adjusted to meet the needs of individual students and groups of students resulting in growth in performance outcomes as measured by the Predictive Acuity Assessment.
 - A building programmer is in place to assign teachers strategically to reduce the achievement gap. As a result, some early-childhood teachers have been reassigned to the upper grades to implement early grade practices, such as movable learning stations, into the upper grades. Additionally, teachers follow students from one grade to the next giving them an advantage to have an in depth understanding of the strengths and needs of their students and provide suitable instruction. An analysis of data resulted in the reassignment of the math and literacy coaches into classrooms. Thus, grade level teachers share the responsibility for aligning the academic needs of their students to the schools instructional goals.
- The school culture of mutual respect creates a safe environment that supports youth development and promotes student learning. (1.4)
 - Monthly attendance celebrations, including parent breakfasts, and trips scheduled for those whose perfect attendance spans a number of months, is offered for students with perfect attendance. A strong emphasis on the arts, particularly music, and the practices of combining technology and literacy in the upper grades, and math and listening skills in the lower grades, results in students who are suitably engaged with a desire to succeed.
 - The student council that meets monthly impacts decisions made in the school. As a result of their request, the school has implemented more creative and healthier lunches. Students who were interested in developing skills in a number of areas, including tennis and cooking, meet with staff on Saturdays to learn these skills. To ensure meeting each student's needs, a crisis intervention counselor works to reduce the

amount of aggressive behavior exhibited in the school, and a “buddy system” allows for each staff member to adopt a troubled student with whom there is a daily check-in. They often have lunch together, thus ensuring someone to whom the student can go for support. These interventions have resulted in increased attendance and fewer suspensions.

- School leaders and faculty consistently engage families in open discussions that promote trust and clear expectations for student achievement. (2.4)
 - The principal maintains an open door policy for parents who indicate that the school is supportive of the needs of the family and that teachers care about the students. Teachers are available to discuss student progress and to assist parents in working with their children. Parent workshops are provided twice a month and offer information around curriculum, testing, student expectations, and homework assistance. In this way, parents were introduced to the Common Core Standards and the changes that will occur in the English language arts and math tests next year. This has resulted in increased parent involvement in the academic achievement of the children.
 - Parents are active members of the school leadership team and as such are part of the decision making process. An active parent association allowed for a strong involvement in planning a health fair, carnival, and poetry fair. This has served to increase parent commitment and leads to creating the culture where students feel safe and work to their full potential.
- The administration communicates high expectations to all constituencies to ensure mutual accountability for student achievement. (3.4)
 - The principal sets high expectations for herself, the staff, and the students and communicates these expectations at all staff meetings, parent association meetings, and at student assemblies. In addition, the Parent Handbook details these expectations. Teachers, through parent teacher conferences and individual meetings with parents, convey expectations and provide parents with packets of material for use at home to enrich student learning. In addition, when a parent expresses a need for additional help, teachers tutor parents so that they can better address their children’s learning, resulting in collaboration between home and school to increase student achievement.
- Staff successfully partner with families and outside organizations to support students’ social development and celebrate academic success. (4.4)
 - The guidance department hosts a ‘Middle School Fair’ that provides parents with information on all schools within the area that are open to their children, including both charter schools and specialized schools. In addition, guidance counselors are available to speak individually with the parents. As a result, parents are able to make educated decisions regarding middle school placement for their children.
 - The school partners with the Museum of Natural History and the Bronx Zoo to supplement their science and social studies program. Music

programs provided by a number of non-profit organizations are heavily represented in the school and provide literacy and math connections. In grades kindergarten through grade 2, 'Music and the Brain' introduces the keyboard and the beginning of music theory, integrates literacy, including biographies of composers and stories of the composition, and uses math rhythms, counting, and musical theory. For the upper grades, 'Music Memory/Riverside Symphony combines technology and music with literacy. Every piece studied has vocabulary, a history of the composer and the piece combined with hands-on activities. The school's heavy involvement Carnegie Hall culminates in a concert where students play recorders with an orchestra. This leads to a high level of student involvement and self-confidence leading to a higher level of student engagement.

What the school needs to improve

- Increase the rigor across the curriculum to ensure all students are consistently cognitively engaged. (1.1)
 - The school incorporates the State standards into the curriculum as they plan across the grades and in all content areas. Teachers are engaged in monthly discussions around the Common Core Standards. Tasks have been administered and student performance analyzed in order to inform instruction on the next unit of study. However, Common Core Standards are not embedded into the curriculum and teacher teams are still in the process of aligning the standards to the pacing chart and existing curriculum. Thus, support for students to deepen their knowledge base is limited.
 - There is an emphasis in differentiating instruction for English language learners and students with disabilities and providing opportunities for these students to engage in problem solving and critical thinking. However, curriculum that engages high performing students in rigorous tasks that emphasize higher order thinking skills is not consistent across the grades. Furthermore, opportunities that are provided for the average performing students do not challenge and extend their higher order thinking skills. Consequently, all students are hindered from performing to their highest potential.
- Strengthen the implementation of instructional strategies so that lessons fully challenge students and result in improved learning outcomes. (1.2)
 - Teacher teams are engaged in on-going discussions around the Common Core Learning Standards, rigor, and data driven differentiation of instruction. In some classrooms, teachers are integrating teaching strategies such as accountable talk, hands-on and tiered activities, to challenge students. Support is given for English language learners and students with disabilities. However, the absence of strategic differentiation with extensions that engage and challenge higher achieving learners and questioning techniques that effectively extend student thinking is not the norm throughout the grades and content areas, thus missing out on suitably challenging every student.

- Refine the use of rubrics and enrich the use of assessment to support teachers in making instructional decisions that help all students work to their full potential. (2.2)
 - The school gathers multiple sources of data to understand student progress and performance. Teachers use both formative and summative data with baseline, mid- and end-line assessments as the main checkpoints. Within the classroom, they use running records, conferencing, and self-designed weekly assessments. They use “Class at a Glance” checklists to create groups with particular attention to English language learners and students with disabilities. However, this information is not used consistently throughout the grades in goal setting and forming flexible groups resulting in limited effectiveness of these assessments in meeting the individual needs of students.
 - Task specific rubrics are being developed and used for evaluative purposes. Rubrics are attached to most pieces of work but there is a lack of consistency in designating where the students have met the criteria. Feedback given to students does not always include clear next steps. This results in missed opportunities for students to improve upon their work.
- Build upon the observation process to provide quality feedback to promote professional growth resulting in improved teacher practice. (4.1)
 - New teachers are supported by a mentor and a grade level “buddy teacher” with whom to consult. Administration conducts weekly focused observations of all teachers after which they share findings verbally. Formal observations of tenured teachers are done two to three times a year, and non-tenured teachers are observed four to five times a year, with written feedback that captures strengths and next steps. An action plan is developed for teachers who are not meeting the school standards of practice. However, observations are not yet fully connected to a research based, common framework that is grounded in a common language, thus limiting the advancement of teacher practice and hindering improving student performance.
- Sharpen school improvement planning and development of specific assessment of all students’ progress towards meeting interim- and long-term goals to ensure measurable outcomes. (5.3)
 - The long-term goals of the school are clearly aligned with the yearly goals of improving student performance in math and literacy and improving and increasing teacher effectiveness. Additionally, the lowest performing groups are clearly identified and practices are implemented to improve their performance. However, needs of higher achieving students are not addressed. Individual teachers as well as teacher teams analyze overall student work to identify gaps and areas for improvement. In meetings, teachers identified general areas of improvement for the group as a whole but did not identify specific areas of focus. By not focusing on individual student work there is a lag in measuring and meeting interim goals, thus impacting improving student achievement.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: Luis Llorens Torres Children's Academy	UD	D	P	WD
Overall QR Score		X		
Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?		X		
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best, and ensure that it is: aligned to the curriculum, engaging, and differentiated to enable all students to produce meaningful work products?		X		
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs as evidenced by meaningful student work products?			X	
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?			X	
Quality Statement 2 – Gather and Analyze Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, analyze and share information on student learning outcomes to understand school and student progress over time.				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level?		X		
2.2 Align assessments to curriculum, use on-going assessment practices and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom level?		X		
2.3 Use grading policies and tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize, aggregate, and analyze student performance trends to inform instruction and curriculum?		X		
2.4 Engage families in school decision-making, activities and an open exchange of information regarding students progress toward school and class expectations?			X	
Quality Statement 3 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently engage the school community and use data to set and track suitably high goals for accelerating student learning.				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of future development that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are understood and supported by the entire school community?		X		
3.2 Use collaborative and data informed processes to set measurable and differentiated learning goals for student subgroups, and students in need of additional support?		X		
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?		X		
3.4 Communicate high expectations to staff, students and families, and support students and families to achieve them?			X	

Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals and student learning and emotional needs.							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection, with a special focus on new teachers?		X					
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?		X					
4.3 Provide professional development that promotes independent and shared reflection, opportunities for leadership growth, and enables teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve learning outcomes?		X					
4.4 Integrate child/youth development, guidance/advisement support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?			X				
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
5.1 Evaluate the quality of curricular, instructional and organizational decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS?		X					
5.2 Evaluate systems for assessing students, organizing data, and sharing information with student and families, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?		X					
5.3 Establish and sustain a transparent, collaborative system for measuring progress towards interim and long term goals and making adjustments during the year and over time?		X					
5.4 Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies?		X					
Quality Review Scoring Key							
UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed